Irish mercenaries in the service of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, 1631. *Described in this contemporary German broadsheet as 'physically strong, enduring much: if bread be scarce, they eat roots'.* (British Museum)

Northern Exposure
Irishmen and Scandinavia in the seventeenth century

by Steve Murdoch

The activities of Irish merchants, students and above all mercenaries living and working in Catholic continental countries, especially France, Spain and Austria, have been well documented. However the histories of Irishmen operating in Scandinavia and northern Europe have been virtually ignored. Yet during the course of the early modern period hundreds of Irishmen sought their fortunes in Protestant Europe as well.

Many contemporaries living on the Continent perceived the Scots and the Irish as a single ethnic group and this has somewhat muddied the waters for researchers. For example Archibald Hamilton is usually referred to in Swedish sources as Irish, doubtless due to his position as Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. However, he was born in Scotland, the son of Sir Claud Hamilton of Cochno, Dumbartonshire, who settled in County Tyrone in 1610. Archibald fled Ireland in 1641 and migrated to Sweden where he died in 1658 or 1659. Despite a strong Irish connection, he is unlikely to have viewed himself as Irish, and clearly the Irish, who drove him out in 1641, concurred.

Whatever their ethnic origin, individuals with close links to Ireland served as diplomats in Scandinavia during the seventeenth century. In 1668, Sir William Temple helped to effect an alliance between the Stuart kingdoms, the Netherlands and Sweden. Temple continued his diplomacy into the 1670s when he again dealt with Sweden, this time to bring to an end its war with Denmark. Viscount Robert Molesworth served as ambassador to Denmark-Norway between 1689 and 1692, a mission terminated when he caused offence at the Danish court. Irish students also studied in the Protestant universities. The matriculation records of Abo, Uppsala, Lund, Copenhagen and Soro contain the names of several Irish students.

Above all Irishmen served as mercenaries in northern armies. The acts of the Privy Council refer to a levy of 2,000 Irish soldiers for Polish service, on condition that they were not used against the Protestant powers of Sweden, Denmark-Norway or Brandenburg. A reliable Swedish source, the agent Anders Svensson, casts doubt on the numbers of Irishmen actually raised, referring to an integrated contingent from all three Stuart kingdoms. On 30 August 1621, Svensson wrote to the Swedish king to announce the arrival of the Polish envoy in the Danish Sound with 300 Irish soldiers bound for Riga. He added that they were the advance guard of a total of 1,400 troops, with 800 more from England and Ireland and 300 from Scotland to follow.

More Irish were recruited for Swedish service in 1623 under the direction of the Scot, Colonel Robert Stewart who used an Irish captain by the name of Butler to recruit soldiers in Ireland. Certainly some of Stewart's troops got through, though the Danish king did place obstacles in the way of free passage. In 1637, Colonel Stuart, another Scotsman, received permission to levy in Ireland for Swedish service. However some of the Irish recruits deserted in Scotland where they were accused of 'lurking in obscure places'. The commission to arrest deserters granted by the Scottish Privy Council shows that the regiment included a mix of Ulster-Scots, Old English and Gaelic Irish.

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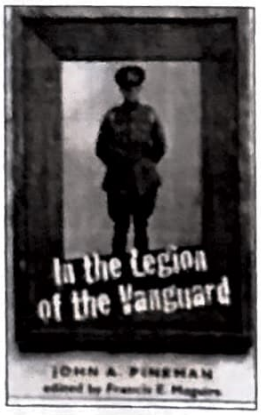

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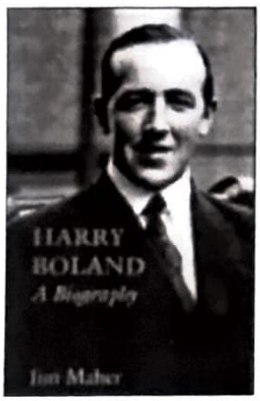

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Three separate periods of conflict, 1625-29, 1643-45 and 1658-60, involving Denmark shed light on patterns of officer enlistment. Throughout the course of these conflicts, the percentage of Scots dropped from just over 90 per cent during the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) to just over 73 per cent during the Danish-Swedish Wars of the 1650's—from nine out of ten to three out of four. As the percentage of Scots declined, the numbers of Irish slightly increased. One possible reason was the secular nature of the wars between Denmark-Norway and Sweden in the 1640s and 1650s. With no religious reason *not* to join the Danish war against Sweden, the opportunities for Irish service in the various Protestant armies must also have increased.

The first of these three wars involved the Danish attempt to break the increasing power of the Empire in northern Europe, an endeavour in which they were, between 1625 and 1629, singularly unsuccessful. Irish officers involved in this conflict included Simon Butler, Adam Lahan, Michael Jones, Andrew Connel, Zacharias Vaughan and a Captain Burke. More Irish officers—Daniel Kelly, Fergus Botuns, Morgan O'Connor, Darbie O'Kellogha, Jakob O'Ryle, Jakob O'Hewe and Robert O'Brien—continued to fight against the Empire for Sweden between 1630 and 1648. Rather than commanding their own regiments, these officers served in Scottish and English ones.

This changed in the 1650s when the Danes engaged a predominantly Irish regiment. The commander was the most famous of the Irish officers active in Scandinavia, Philip O'Sullivan Moore, or Mor as he signed himself. O'Sullivan Moore undertook to levy an infantry regiment in 1657, to be raised in Ireland and to consist of ten companies, each containing 100 men. The regiment is referred to in most sources as an Irish-Scottish regiment though the officers were mostly Irish and included such men as Diarmuid O'Sullivan, Patrick Kennedy, Boetius Egan, Andrew Calvertz, Marcus Bagatt and Diarmuid Murphy. Several of the Irish officers are known to have been Irish Confederates and strong Stuart supporters. Indeed, Philip O'Sullivan Moore requested permission to leave Danish service specifically because Charles II was contemplating an attempt to regain his kingdoms by force.

Another influential Irishman, Colonel Patrick O'Sullivan, also confusingly referred to as O'Sullivan Moore, arrived in Danish service from the Swedish army and gained promotion to commandant of the garrison at Buxtehude in 1657. Indeed, throughout the seventeenth century some fifty officers from Ireland found themselves in the service of these kingdoms. The muster rolls contain the names of Irish noblemen like Constantine O'Neill who was captured at Helsingborg in 1690 but who soon gained promotion from the ranks to become an officer in the Danish army. His kinsman Felix O'Neill rose in rank and circumstance after being imprisoned by King William for six months in 1689. He entered Danish service at the head of 100 men where they served in the Queen's life regiment. Felix managed to persuade another 300 troops, presumably Irish, to join the Danes for which he gained promotion into Prince Frederick's life regiment. More Irishmen, like Hugh Kelly, joined the Danish army after being captured from James VI and II's Own Guard. Hugh served first as a grenadier with twenty others, though he was soon promoted to sergeant and eventually to captain in 1708. Other Irishmen, like Peter Lacy, joined Russian service. Lacy became a highly regarded soldier and eventually rose to fame as a field marshall in the service of the Tsar.

These details of Irishmen living and serving in the Protestant north derive from a wider study of the Scots in Scandinavia. They are drawn from a relational database, *Scotland, Scandinavia and Northern Europe 1580-1707* (SSNE), which contains details of 5,000 members of the intellectual, military and political elite from Scotland, England and Ireland in Northern Europe. The SSNE database challenges Irish historians to consider a similar initiative for Irish, Scottish and English migrants and mercenaries living and working in Southern Europe. Extensive muster rolls, regimental records, diplomatic correspondence and other source materials survive in the archives of Spain, Belgium, Austria and France which, if vigorously interrogated, would shed much light on Irish migration to the Catholic countries of Europe.

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